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# THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

*MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY*

Volume I - Number 2 April, 1961

## AN 1876 HARVEST

by

NATHAN C. SWEET

Harvest began on the E.W. Chapman Ranch, a short distance from the very new town of Madera, on the nineteenth of June, 1876, and ended on the fourteenth of October. The Time Book, from which this information was obtained, was started a few months earlier and continued for two years.

### 1876 WAGES

Two ranch hands and a Chinese hostler had been working through the winter, the hands receiving a dollar-and-a-half per day and the hostler twenty-five dollars per month. Two more men were added during May and a thirty-five dollar per month Chinese cook, Jim Lee. When harvest started the crew consisted of seven ranch hands, an engineer, a specialist who may have operated the header, and a blacksmith. By the end of June nine men were harvesting and wages were raised to two dollars per day with the specialist getting a dollar more.

On July eighth threshing started with an additional crew of fifteen men including the engineer, the threshers receiving two-fifty and three dollars per day. Harvesting was completed on August twelfth;

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## HISTORY OF FREMONT WESTFALL FAMILY

by

ARCH WESTFALL

Fremont Westfall came to California from West Virginia the year of 1882. He worked for Joe Westfall (no relation) on his ranch near Darrah, Mariposa Co. He later worked for the Sugar Pine Co. patroling a section of flume to keep the lumber moving freely to Madera. There were times when the trains of lumber would get caught enroute and cause a jam. He also worked for an ice company in San Francisco delivering ice with a two-horse team.

In 1895 (the year he an my mother were married) he purchased a place in Bailey Flat from a couple named Greenwood. As it was then unsurveyed land, they had not homesteaded. He paid them $350.00 for what property they had: a three-room house, small barn, two horses, a cow, and two donkeys. They also had a number of producing fruit trees.

The first two or three years my father was on the place, he packed fruit and vegetables on the donkeys to Grub Gulch (about five miles) to sell. Later he built a road and hauled produce in a light wagon with two horses. The sale of fruit and vegetables was the only income for some time bringing in $400 or $500 annually.

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some of the harvesters were transferred to threshing, some to handling and hauling the sacked grain at forty dollars per month, and others were laid off. The threshing continued with a reduced crew until the season ended in October.

The payroll for the peak month of July was fourteen hundred and sixty dollars. The men received their board in addition to the cash wages. Two Chinese cooks were employed throughout July. Thirty-three was the highest number of men listed for one day in July.

## MACHINE AGE

Grain raising in the San Joaquin Valley became profitable with advent of the railroad and the invention of machines adapted to large, level land areas. These included the gang plow, header or reaper, and steam-powered separator or threshing machine - the first one appearing in the Valley in 1870.

Center of farm machinery manufacture was the city of Stockton, the Stockton Gang or multiple plow originating there. The shortage of labor during the Sixties caused by the War accelerated the improvement of the reaper or header as the special machine, adapted for California use, was called. Elliott's History of Fresno County, published in 1882, gives a description of how the harvest was accomplished.

## The HEADER & SEPARATOR

The header was pushed instead of being pulled by horses, the number required depending upon the width of the machine used. The operator stood upon the tongue and raised or lowered the scythe as required. The heads of grain with whatever length of stalk needed was delivered mechanically from one side into a wagon with side boards of the bed, farthest from the header built up higher in order to catch the grain. The wagon traveled close to and at the same pace as the machine it was attending until it was full, when it was replaced by an empty wagon.

Besides the driver, each wagon carried a man in the bed who leveled off the load as they advanced. The loaded wagons proceeded to the separator and pulled up alongside of a raised platform upon which the contents of the wagon were pitched by the crew. The platform men, in turn, fed the heads and straw into the separator. The grain flowed from the separator on the side opposite the platform into new sacks. One man filled the sacks and another sewed them up across the top and stacked them.

The straw and chaff was blown out of the separator and piled up on the ground until it was hauled away by a team of horses, with eyes covered for protection, attached to a large wooden shovel. The separator was powered by a steam engine, mounted on a horizontal boiler, similar to an old-fashioned locomotive, at some distance away, but connected by a long belt.

## STRAW for FUEL

One of the most difficult jobs was to keep up the steam in the boiler as the fuel used was usually straw, it being the only kind available. It took five men, one after the other, to keep the fire burning under the Chapman boiler.

The last operation consisted of loading the sacks of grain upon a wagon and hauling them to warehouse or railroad car where they were unloaded and stacked. Much wheat was shipped to Stockton where the Sperry Company was already well established.

# AN EARLY TRIP TO YOSEMITE

by

MURIEL W. SWEET

My mother was born in 1851. In 1853 her mother died of tuberculosis as had her grandmother. When in her senior year at Vassar College, 1872, she began to develop a chest condition, her New York doctor suggested my grandfather take her on a trip West and keep her "out-of-doors" for a year.

Packing their bags they started for California - the party consisting of my grandfather, my mother, a Methodist minister and his wife. On crossing the plains the train was detained quite some time to allow a herd of buffalo to cross the tracks - the highlight of the train trip.

Reaching Merced they took a stage to Mariposa and over Chowchilla Mountain to Galen Clark Station (which is now Wawona). From there they rode horses to Peregoy Meadow where they stayed overnight at Mountain View House.

In the morning they continued on horseback to the floor of the Valley and took lodging at Hutching's Hotel. On being shown to their rooms, they found to their dismay, the partitions were of unbleached sheeting; but being exhausted from their long, unaccustomed ride, they were thankful for any place to retire. However, sleep was not to be their lot as a continual hammering prevented their having a restful night. Enquiring as to the cause of all the commotion, they were informed that a carpenter was making a coffin for a man who had fallen off a cliff.

In spite of a rather gruesome beginning to the first wonderful experience of seeing Yosemite in its almost primeval state, the party was most enthusiastic about its wonders.

From there they went to Calistoga Hot Springs for the baths that even then were considered quite the thing to do to restore one to health. Whether it was the springs or the marvelous time of seeing a new country one cannot say, but on returning home my mother went back to Vassar, graduated in the second class, and lived to the grand age of 95.

Pictured above is Miss Annie Hoyt viewing Yosemite Valley in 1872 with a traveling companion.

WESTFALL FAMILY (Continued)

About 1900 some orange trees were planted on the place and are still bearing with 18 left. Three fig trees and an olive tree of the orchard planted by Greenwoods are still living and bearing. Estimated age is 85 years.

My parents bought a cow or two to add to the one purchased with the place. They increased this start into a herd (about 125 head) in from 15 to 20 years. They then kept about that many over the years making a living that way, as by that time the sale of fruit and vegetables had about ended.

My father homesteaded the place and over the years purchased adjoining land until he had accumulated about 1500 acres. The average price of land, at the time, was $5.00 per acre.

1898 they tore down the original house on the place building a five room house which is still being used as a dwelling place.

The first 15 or more years my parents got their mail at the small mining town named Grub Gulch located about 14 miles north of Raymond on the road to Ahwahnee. At the time it consisted of a Post Office, two stores, two hotels, one saloon, and a few private homes. All the buildings are now gone, as the residents left after the mines closed.

My mother, Isabelle Smither, was a native of the Darrah district in Mariposa County (about 12 miles north of Bailey Flat.

Fremont Westfall passed away the year 1940 at the age of 79; Isabelle Westfall, 1949, at the age of 84.

I purchased the home place consisting of 320 acres from my mother in 1947, and live in the old ranch house raising cattle as a means of livelihood.

"ORCHIDS TO A LADY"

March 10, 1961, the Society had the pleasure of congratulating Miss Winifred Sledge on the occasion of her NINETY-FIFTH birthday. Miss Sledge, now residing at 258 North Blackstone, Fresno, came to Borden from Missouri with her parents at the age of two.

For her birthday, the Society honored Miss Sledge with flowers delivered by Mrs. H. Clay Dalton.

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SPRING QUARTERLY MEETING

April 12, 1961, Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.
Spring Quarterly Meeting of the Society in Lucca's Restaurant, Madera, California.
Speaker: Dr. Raymund F. Wood of Fresno State College
Subject: The Cross on Table Mountain

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MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

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